



Skills Funding  
Agency

# Minimum Standards

Frequently Asked Questions

March 2013

Of interest to all colleges and training organisations

## 1. Why are we introducing Minimum Standards?

The document [New Challenges, New Chances](#) committed to increased freedoms and flexibilities and reduce bureaucracy and government intervention in the further education (FE) sector. As part of this, we promised to reform the current Minimum Levels of Performance (MLP) methodology. After extensive discussions with the FE sector and a review of MLP we decided to introduce Minimum Standards that will be:

- **Simple** – by removing: (a) the complex exemptions methodology, and (b) the use of weighted guided learning hours (glh) success rates in Classroom-based Learning, instead applying the new Minimum Standards to conventional qualification success rates (QSR).
- **Transparent** – by using the standard and conventional QSR used across the FE sector the approach is transparent to all colleges and training organisations; it will support colleges and training organisations to identify their own underperformance.
- **Fair** – the Agency's intervention strategy as described in the [Provider Risk Assessment and Management](#) (PRAM) document will be applied fairly and transparently.

## 2. How will the Minimum Standards methodology work?

We will set a threshold for each of four blocks of provision, known as 'provision type' (classroom-based long; classroom-based short; Apprenticeships; and workplace learning). The threshold sets the success rate below which provision is considered below the Minimum Standard.

We will apply the thresholds to success rates at qualification aim and Apprenticeship framework level. If the qualification aim or Apprenticeship framework success rate is below the minimum threshold, then we will classify all starts or leavers as falling below the acceptable standard. We will then calculate the number of starts or leavers who experience provision below the Minimum Standard in each provision type as a proportion of the total. If the proportion of starts or leavers in unacceptable

provision exceeds the tolerance level, then the provision type will be in the scope of formal intervention.

This approach will take into account the whole provider level of underperformance for each type of provision delivered.

### **3. What is meant by types of provision?**

We will apply Minimum Standards separately to four types of provision delivered by a college or training organisation:

- classroom-based learning – long (more than 24 weeks)
- classroom-based learning – short (from 5-24 weeks duration)
- workplace learning
- Apprenticeships.

### **4. What are the Minimum Standards thresholds?**

The Minimum Standards thresholds are similar to the current MLP. We will apply the following thresholds for the different types of provision:

- classroom based learning applied to adults only:
  - long duration – 63 per cent (including AS-level) and 75 per cent for A-levels
  - short duration – 65 per cent (excluding AS-level, which will be 63 per cent) and 75 per cent for A-levels
- workplace provision applied to adults only – 68 per cent
- Apprenticeships applied to all ages – 55 per cent.

### **5. What is the Minimum Standards tolerance level?**

The tolerance level is the total proportion of provision falling below Minimum Standards, above which the Skills Funding Agency will take action as set out in the [PRAM](#) document.

The Minimum Standards tolerance level is the total proportion of starts or leavers who were on qualification aims or Apprenticeship frameworks that had success rates below the Minimum Standards thresholds for each provision type.

For 2012/13 the tolerance level is set at 40 per cent of total starts or leavers that a college or training organisation delivers below the minimum threshold.

## **6. What age groups are in scope of Skills Funding Agency Minimum Standards?**

The scope of Minimum Standards applies to different age groups:

- classroom-based learning (long and short course duration), including adults only (19+)
- workplace learning provision, including adults only (19+)
- Apprenticeships include all ages (16- to 18-year-olds and adults).

## **7. What qualifications are in scope of the new Minimum Standards?**

All publicly funded qualifications that contribute to the calculation of QSRs for 2012/13 are included in the new Minimum Standards, with the exception of:

- classroom-based learning – very short course duration (less than five weeks)
- functional skills
- Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) unit-sized aims
- Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS).

As the new Minimum Standards is based on QSR, all distance learning will also be in scope (previously this was not weighted by glh).

**8. When will you introduce Minimum Standards?**

We will publish Minimum Standard provider reports on the Provider Gateway by December 2013 for classroom-based learning, and January 2014 for Apprenticeships and workplace learning provision. They will apply to 2012/13 success rates.

**9. Are the Minimum Standards a benchmark for performance?**

Colleges and training organisations should ensure that they do not use the Minimum Standards thresholds as quality benchmarks for performance. The average success rates are significantly above the standards set out in the Minimum Standards thresholds, and colleges and training organisations should aim much higher than this, to deliver good and excellent provision to their learners.

The Skills Funding Agency expects all colleges and training organisations to set challenging quality improvement targets using appropriate benchmarking data. It is for colleges and training organisations to identify the improvements required in the quality of the learners' experience to achieve this.

**10. Will we have any information before December 2013 to show the impact of Minimum Standards?**

To support the continued consultation and communication with the FE sector we will publish colleges' and training organisations' shadow Minimum Standards reports in spring 2013. This will allow them to see how they would have performed based on 2011/12 QSR data. The aim is to enable colleges and training organisations to identify areas for improvement before going live with the new Minimum Standards from December 2013 based on 2012/13 QSR data.

We will use MLP to assess performance in the 2011/12 academic year and publish reports in March 2013 on the [Measuring Quality](#) page of the Agency's website.

**11. Has the FE sector had an opportunity to comment on Minimum Standards?**

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Skills Funding Agency have consulted widely with provider representative organisations, including:

- the Association of Colleges
- the Association of Learning and Employment Providers
- the 157 Group
- the Sixth Form Colleges' Association
- LEAFA
- NATSPEC (the Association of National Specialist Colleges) and individual colleges and training organisations
- the Learning and Skills Improvement Service
- Ofsted
- the Department for Education
- the Education Funding Agency.

We will continue to consult with the FE sector on further development of the Minimum Standards.

**12. Will the Minimum Standards thresholds and tolerance level change?**

We intend to review the Minimum Standards thresholds and tolerances each year and aim to notify the FE sector of any changes before the start of the academic year in which we plan to implement the changes.

**13. Will the Minimum Standards change?**

We are currently considering a number of possible developments for Minimum Standards in the future, which *may* involve:

- including OLASS provision from 2014/15
- including functional skills in classroom-based learning from 2013/14
- the use of QCF categories from 2013/14

- reviewing the requirement to have a distinction between classroom-based and workplace learning
- looking at wider performance measures beyond success rates.

**14. What will happen if a college or training organisation fails to meet the Minimum Standards?**

This is outlined in the Agency's [PRAM process](#).

**15. Will the Minimum Standards provider reports indicate where there is underperformance?**

The Minimum Standards provider reports will highlight provision which falls below Minimum Standards at qualification level, Subject Sector Area, QCF-size and each individual qualification aim/Apprenticeship framework.

The reports are intended to support colleges and training organisations identify poor performance and improve quality.



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